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## NOTICE OF A BOOK ENTITLED "BEWARE THE CAT."

BY ROBERT MALCOMSON, ESQ.

WITH NOTES BY THE REV. JAMES GRAVES.

THE late Mr. Herbert F. Hore, in the Proceedings of the Society for March, 1859 (*vide* "Journal," Vol. II., 2nd s., page 310), called attention to "a singularly curious and interesting volume under this quaint title," which about twenty-four years previously had been advertised for sale in Thorpe's Catalogue, in the hope that some of his readers would take up the chase which that eminent archæologist had unsuccessfully pursued in search of a copy of the work. The volume noticed by Mr. Hore (and the recovery of which he was so anxious to procure) had formerly belonged to the Heber collection, and the owner had written in it the remark—"No other copy known, I believe."

In the month of December, 1866, a copy of the work turned up for sale at the auction-rooms of Messrs. Puttick and Simpson, Leicester-square, London, in a collection of rare and curious books, in the Catalogue of which its authorship is attributed to William Baldwin, and the volume itself described as "a pleasant absurdity, in prose and verse; but the verse is sometimes printed as prose. Dedicated to the Right Worshipful John Yung, who was maker of interludes, comedies and plays to Henry VIII. Of this extremely rare little book we have not been able to trace any perfect copy. The present (as usual) wants the title."

This copy was procured at the sale by the writer. Though wanting the title page, it has the colophon as follows:—"Imprinted at London, at the Long Shop adjoyn-  
ing unto St. Mildred's Church, in the Pultrie, by Edward Allde, 1584." It is a small (duodecimo size), black letter tract, unpagged, but may be thus collated:—"T. K. to the Reader" (an address in verse), one leaf; the Dedication, "To the Right Worshipful Esquire John Yung;" signed "G. B." [Gulielmus Baldwin], one leaf; "The Argument," three pages; the text or body of the work (which is divided into three "partes"), seventy-four pages; "An

Exhortation," two pages ; "The Himne," one page ; and "Colophon," one page.

William Baldwin (or Baldwyn) was the author of "A Treatise of Morall Philosophie, contayning the Sayinges of the Wyse," the first edition of which appears to have been "imprinted at London, in Fletestrete, at the sygne of the Sunne, over againste the Conduyte, by Edward Whit-churche, the xx daye of Januarie, in the year of our Lorde 1547," and of which there were several subsequent editions (see Hazlitt's "Handbook of Popular Literature," just published, page 22).

It would appear from expressions in the "Address to the Reader," that the little book, "Beware the Cat," now under notice, had been previously published in some shape or other. An earlier edition is quoted in Ritson's "Bibl. Poet." as having been printed in 1561; and Mr. Corser had a fragment of four leaves (no more known) of "A Marvelous Hystory, intitulede, 'Beware the Cat,' conteyning diverse wunderful and incredible matters, very pleasant and mery to read. Imprinted at London, in Fleete-street, at the sign of the Faulcon, by William Griffith, and are to be sold at his shop, in St. Dunston's Churchyarde, anno, 1570."

In the "Argument" the writer proceeds to tell us how "at Christmas, he was at Court with Master Ferrers (then Master of the King's Majesty's pastimes), about setting forth of certain interludes, which, for the King's recreation, they had devised, and were in learning ; in which time, among many other exercises among themselves, they used nightly at their lodging to talke of sundry things for the furtherance of such offices wherein eche man as then served, for which purpose it pleased Master Ferrers to make the writer his bedfellow ; and upon a pallet cast upon the rushes in his owne chamber to lodge Master Willot and Master Streamer, the one his astronomer, the other his divine ;" and how upon a certain occasion there fel a controversie between "Master Streamer and the writer as to whether birds and beasts had reason, Master Streamer affirming that they had, and that as much as men, yea, and in some points more ;" and "the divine" winds up by saying, "If that I thought you would be content to hear me, and, with-

out any interruption til I have done, to mark what I say, I would tel you such a story of one peece of myne own experimenting as should both make you wunder, and put you out of dout concerning this matter." When the company had promised attention, "he turned himself so in his bed as they might best hear," and he delivered the "yarn" which is the subject matter of the tract.

In the course of his narrative (or oration as the writer terms it), Master Streamer introduces a variety of speakers, and amongst others one "which had been in Ireland," who tells the tale which excited Mr. Hore's curiosity as follows :—

"While I was in *Yreland*, in the time that *Mackmorro*<sup>1</sup> & all the rest of the wilde Lords were the King's enemies, what time also mortall warre was betweene the *Fitzharrises*<sup>2</sup> & the Prior and Cōvent of the Abbey of *Tintern*, who counted them the King's friends and subjects, whose neighbour was *Cayr Macart*, a wilde Irish man, then the King's enemy, and one which dayly made inrodes into the countie of *Vvashford*, and burned such Townes and caried away all such Cattel as he might cō by, by means whereof all the Cuntry from *Climine*<sup>3</sup> to *Rosse* became a wast wildernes, and is scarce renovated until this day. In this time, I say, as I was on a night at *Coshery*<sup>4</sup> w<sup>th</sup> one of *Fitzhérie's* Churles, we fel in talke as we have don now of straüge adventures and of Cats, and these among other things the Churle (for so they call all farmers and husbandmen), told me as you shall heare. There was not seven yeres past a *Kern* of John Butlers<sup>5</sup> dwelling in the *Fassock* of *Bantry*,<sup>6</sup> called *Patrik Apore*,<sup>7</sup> who minding to make a pray in the night upon *Cayer Makart*

<sup>1</sup> *Macmorro*. The Mac Murroughs, or Kavanaghs, still unconquered, held the strong mountain fastnesses lying between the counties of Carlow and Wexford, and extending down the left bank of the Barrow to near New Ross. Cahir Mac Art was head of one sept of the Kavanaghs at this period : he was created Baron of Ballyanne by Queen Mary, and from his son, "Brian of Borris," is descended Arthur Mac Murrough Kavanagh, Esq., M. P., of Borris.

<sup>2</sup> *Fitzharris*. The Fitzharrises were Anglo-Norman settlers in Wexford. The prior and convent of Tintern sided with the Kavanaghs.

<sup>3</sup> *Climine*, now Clonmines, the site of an extinct town on the western shore of Bannow Bay. The ruins of a conventual church, and some military remains, together with a very interesting castellated

dwelling for the rector, close to the parish church, mark the site of the town.

<sup>4</sup> *Coshery*, i. e. *cíor na píṛṣ* — the chief's tribute—an exaction of provisions and lodging for himself and followers. In the present day, a person who quarters himself on his friends, is called in Ireland a cosherer.

<sup>5</sup> *John Butler*. Fourth son of Richard first Viscount Mountgarret, who had grants of land in Wexford between New Ross and the Kavanaghs' country.

<sup>6</sup> *Fassock* of *Bantry*, i. e. the *pápaṁ* or desert tract, weald or wild, of Bantry, then a sort of march land lying between the Kavanaghs and the English settlers in Wexford.

<sup>7</sup> *Patrick Apore*. Probably one of the Hores, an ancient Anglo-Norman Wexford family.

his master's enemy, got him with his boy (for so they call their horse-keepers be they never so olde knaves) into his Cuntrie, and in the night time entered into a town of two howses,<sup>1</sup> and brake in and slue the people, and then took such cattel as they foud, which was a cow and a sheep, and departed therewith homeward, but douting they should be pursued (the Curre dogs made such a shril barking) he got him to a church, thinking to lurk ther til midnight was past, for ther he was suer that no man would respect or seek him, for the wild Irish men had churches in such reverence, til our men taught them the contrary,<sup>2</sup> that they neither would nor durst either rob ought thence, or hurt any mā that took the churchyard for sanctury, no though he had killed his father; and while this *Kern* was in the church, he thought it best to dine, for he had eaten litle that day, wherfore he made his boy go gather sticks and strake fire with his feres, and made a fire in the church, and killed the sheep, and after the Irish fashion layd it there upon, and rosted it: but when it was ready, and that he thought to eat it, there came in a cat<sup>3</sup> and set her by him, and said in Irish *Shane foel*,<sup>4</sup> which is, give me some meat; he amased at this gave her the quarter that was in his hand, whiche immediately she did eat up, and asked more, till she had cōsumed all the sheep, and like a cormorāt not satisfied therwith, asked stil for more, wherfore they supposed it were the Devil, and therefore thinking it wisdome to please him, killed the Cow which they had stolen, and when they had flaid it, gave the Cat a quarter, which she immediatly devoured; thē they gave her two other quarters, and in the mean while, after the contrie fashion, they did cut a peece of the hide, and pricked it upon fower stakes<sup>5</sup> which they set about the fire, and therein they set a peece of the Cow for themselves, and with the rest of the hide they made eche of them laps to were about their feet like broges,<sup>6</sup> bothe to keep theire feet from hurt all the next day, and also to serve for meat the next night if they could get none other, by broyling thē upon coles. By this time the Cat had eaten three quarters, and called for more, wherfor they gave her that which was a seething, and douting lest when she had eaten

Irish curs bark sore.

The wilde Irishe men were better then we in reverencing their religion.

The olde Irish diet was to dine at night.

A malapert gest that cometh unbidden.

A cat did eat a sheep.

The wood Kerns cookry.

Kerns for lack of meat eat their shoos rosted.

<sup>1</sup> A town of two howses, i. e. a "bally" or township, containing two farm-houses. What a picture of the then state of Ireland is here presented—the pitiless slaying of "the people"—the carrying away of their miserable cow and sheep!—and all this told as a matter of course, or, rather, as a praiseworthy action.

<sup>2</sup> Taught them the contrary. A very creditable lesson. "The wild Irish men" appear here to much better advantage than their opponents.

<sup>3</sup> A cat. Stories about "uncannie" cats

are still rife in Ireland; but this story of the bivouac in the desecrated church, and the fate of the kern and his boy, is the most weird one I have ever met with.

<sup>4</sup> *Shane foel*. *peoil* is "flesh," but the previous word is not recognizable.

<sup>5</sup> *Pricked it upon four stakes*. This is very interesting, as explaining clearly the old Irish practical mode of boiling beef in the skin of the cow.

<sup>6</sup> The inhabitants of the Aran Islands, off the coast of Galway, wear shoes of this kind still. See Wilde's "Catalogue," p. 281.

that she would eat thē to, because they had no more for her, they got thē out of the Church, and the *Kern* tooke his horse, and away he rode as fast as he could hie. When he was a mile or two from the Church, the moone

A Kern killed  
Grimalkin.

Kern took his dart, and turning his face toward her, flang it, and stroke her thorough with it; but immediatly there came

Cats did kill and  
eat a man.

to her such a sight of Cats that after long fight with them his boy was killed, and eaten up, and he him self, as good and as swift as his horse was, had much to do to scape. When he was come home, and had put of his harnes<sup>1</sup> (which was a Corslet of maile, made like a Shirt, and his Scul covered over with gilt leather, and crested

The Kernes Ar-  
mour.

with Otterskin), all weary and hungry, set him down by his wife, and tolde her his adventure, which when a kitling which his wife kept, scarce half a yeere, had heard, up she started, and said,

A kitling killeth  
the Kern that slew  
Grim.

hast thou killed *Grimalkin*? and therewith she plunged in his face, and with her teeth took him by the throte, and ere y<sup>e</sup> shee could be takē away she had strangled him. This the Churle tolde me now about [xxxiii] winters past, and it was doon as he and divers other credible men infoarmed me not seaven yeares before.”

We have quoted the entire of the “Churle’s Tale.” The discourse subsequently turned upon witches, and their doings, which brought out our friend (“he that had been in Ireland”) with some more of his experience, as follows:—

“I cannot tel by what means witches do change their one likenes and the shapes of other things. But I have heard of so many and seen so much myself that I am sure they do it, for in Ireland (as they have

Witches are reve-  
renced for fear.

been in England) witches are for feare had in high reverēce, and they be so cunning that they can chaunge the shapes of thigs as they list at their pleasure and so deceve the people therby that an act was made in Irelād that no mā should buy any red swine. The cause whereof was this.

An Act forbid-  
ding to buy red  
swine.

Sorcerers make  
swine of hay and  
other baggage.

Witches used to sēd to y<sup>e</sup> markets many red swine fair and fat to see unto, as any mought be, and would in that forme cōtinew long, but it chanced the buiers of them to bring them to any water; immediatly they found thē returned either into wisps of Haye, Straw, old rotten bords, or some other such like trūpery, by meanes wherof they have lost their money, or such

<sup>1</sup> *Harnes*. I do not know of a more graphic description of the armour worn by the Irish kerns in Henry VIII.’s time than we have here given. The steel “skull” or bascinet, covered with gilded leather, and crested with otterskin, and

the shirt of mail, or hauberk, constitute a species of defensive armour or “harness,” which had ceased to be the fashion in England for more than three centuries. The date at the end of the passage fixes the period at about A. D. 1521.

Men turned into wolves. other cattel as they gave in exchange for thē. There is also in Ireland one nation<sup>1</sup> whereof sōe one man and woman are at every seven yeares end turned into Wulves and so continew in the woods the space of seven years, and if they hap to live out y<sup>t</sup> time, they return to their own forme again; and other twaine are turned for the like time into the same shape, which is a penance (as they say) enjoyned that stock by Saint Patrick for some wickedness of their ancestors, and y<sup>t</sup> this is true witnessed, a man whom I left alive in Ireland who had performed this seven yeares penance whose wife was slaine while she was a Wulf in her last year. This man told to many men whose cattel he had worried and whose bodyes he had assailed while he was a wulf, so plain and evident tok's y<sup>t</sup> showed such scares of wounds which other men had given him bothe in his mannes shape before he was a wulf and in his wulf shape since, which al appered upon his skin, that it was evident to all men, yea and to y<sup>e</sup> Bishop to (upon whose grant it was recorded and regestered), that the matter was undoubtedly past peradventure."

The volume contains nothing farther relating to Ireland. We have searched in vain through the Statute Book for the "Act against red swine" to which our Hibernian Munchausen alludes. A legislative enactment of the Irish Parliament (11 Elizabeth, chap. 4), "for the preservation of Salmon frie and Ele frie," prevented any person allowing swine "to be fedd or pastured upon any strand of any river between the 5th March and last day of September in every year, upon payne of forfeiture of the same swine," &c.; and in the same Queen's reign, "An Act against Witchcraft and Sorcery" (28 Elizabeth, chap. 2.) was passed in general terms, without any particular instances of enchantment, charm, or sorcery.

Since the notice was communicated to the Society, the first portion of the library of the Rev. Thomas Corser, M. A., F. S. A., was dispersed by auction under the hammer of Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, in London (on July 28, 1868), and the copy of the work, "Beware the Cat," which had formerly belonged to Mr. Heber, sold for £12 5s.

<sup>1</sup> *One nation.* This story is a very old one. Giraldus Cambrensis, in his "Topographia Hibernica," Dist. ii., cap. xix.,

places this tribe in Ossory, and tells the story much as it is given here. Giraldus only repeats the older Irish legends.